



MORAGA

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Progress update of 2023 Town Goals and Priorities

By Vera Kochan

Much has been accomplished last year with regards to Moraga's 2023 Goals and Priorities that had been set forth by the Town Council. There were 14 specific categories that were agreed upon, with a significant amount of completion having been achieved.

According to Town Manager Scott Mitnick's March 13 staff report, the town wanted to "continue to lay the foundation and create pathways for a better mix of housing and the re-vitalization of the Town's two commercial areas, including adopting a certified Housing Element, rezoning the commercial centers and Bollinger Canyon, updating the General Plan, and completing an evacuation study." The Town received State Certification of its Housing Element and rezoned two large commercial centers to allow for commercial, housing, and mixed-use projects to align with California's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RNHA) requirement of 1,118 new housing units. Also, Rheem Valley Center Ob-

jective Design Standards, along with the Affordable Housing Ordinance, were adopted. The town also re-zoned the Bollinger Canyon Special Study Area & Adopted Development Standards. It began the General Plan 2040 Update Process and started work with Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA), Lafayette, and Orinda to prepare a Lamorinda Region Evacuation Study while applying for a Sustainable Communities Grant to fund it.

Mitnick's report noted another goal was to "maintain fiscal discipline, position the Town for long-term fiscal sustainability, and efficiently sustain core operations of the Town and services to our residents." The Town converted from an annual budget format to a biennial budget format, and adopted a balanced biennial operating & CIP budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 and fiscal year 2024-2025 which included a five-year CIP forecast. Moraga continued to adhere to a 50% General Fund Budget Reserve Pol-

icy, refunded \$4.7 million 2013 certificates of participation debt, and earned Standard & Poor's AAA General Government Credit Rating.

The Town is on track to "complete the second year of the 2022-2024 'Worst First Residential Streets' Pavement Reconstruction Project" and has thus far rehabilitated 3.6 miles of streets, improving Moraga's overall Pavement Condition Index (PCI) from 74 to 76. The percentage of "Poor Condition" and "Very Poor Condition" in all street categories has been reduced, and the overall residential streets "Poor Condition" category dropped from 3.4% (2020) to 1.1% (2024), while the "Very Poor Condition" category dropped from 1.1% (2020) to 0.6%. The Town's overall PCI ranking placed Moraga's streets in the Bay Area's top 20%. The Pavement Rehabilitation projects will be combined into one, which is currently out to bid, soon becoming the largest project of its kind for the Town.

The staff report dis-

cussed the continuation of the "Storm Drain Operations and Maintenance Program and completion of 2021-2023 storm drain capital improvement projects" by referring to the Annual Storm Drain Repairs Project which is out for a re-bid; the Moraga Road Drainage Improvements Project out for bid this summer; and the continuing work on the Laguna Creek Restoration at the Hacienda de las Flores Phase 2 project.

Also on the list was to "support high-quality police and emergency response services, including securing energy alternatives for emergencies, and coordinate with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) on fire safety and planning." The Moraga Police Department (MPD) ensured compliance with state training requirements for its police officers, including crisis intervention and de-escalation training. MPD worked with MOFD on emergency responses, special events, evacuation planning, and in responding to SB 1000 (environmental justice). There were community-wide virtual evacuation drills and training with Saint Mary's College public safety personnel. The General Plan Safety Element was updated with input from MPD and MOFD.

Moraga sought to "enhance the Town's parks, open space and facilities for the benefit of the public and move forward with public input into a Town-Wide Recreation and Open Space Plan." Mitnick's update stated that the Art in Public Spaces Committee approved four sculptures on loan from two artists and a mural to be located on the Corporate Yard wall. Moraga also completed the Commons Park Picnic Area Renovation Project; began the Disc Golf

Course Improvements Project; completed two Eagle Scout Park Projects; worked with Contra Costa County Fire on vegetation abatement projects using Measure X Funding; completed carpet/furniture replacement and exterior lighting at the Moraga Library; completed the design and construction of Commons Park Picnic Area Renovation Project; and made progress on Commons Park Restroom Replacement Project.

The Town pursued "measures designed to improve traffic, pedestrian, and bicycle safety, especially around our schools, crosswalks, through routes, and residential street entry points to the Town's main roadways." According to Mitnick, MPD conducted patrols designed to address traffic complaints from residents. Also begun was the Moraga Road and Campolindo Drive Traffic Safety and Circulation Study Project, Smart Signals Project Agreements, and an agreement with CCTA to move forward on the Moraga and Canyon Road (St. Mary's Road to Sanders Drive) Complete Streets Project. Additionally, the Federal Highway Safety Improvement Program Cycle-10 grant for Safety Improvement projects and a Caltrans authorized Cycle-11 SIP will begin. The Corliss Drive Safe Routes to School Project is moving forward, and the Town received a \$600,000 MTC Priority Development Area Planning Grant for its School Street Complete Streets Project.

Mitnick's report stated that the Town

hoped to "work with the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, Saint Mary's College, and our local school districts to enhance Moraga's business and education climate." The Town coordinated with the Chamber to execute the Community Faire, Bunnies & Brews, and Hacienda Nights; encouraged its staff to attend Chamber mixer events; conducted General Plan 2040 outreach with Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School's Safety Committee; conducted an outreach with SMC along with a "State of the Town" luncheon; and expanded After-School Enrichment Programs.

Moraga continued "outreach to the public and provided opportunities for input from all segments of the community." MPD participated in National Night Out, increased its presence on school campuses, and assigned a juvenile police officer to work with students. The Town completed a Moraga Parks and Recreation Community Survey, a Senior Programming Focus Group, a Corp Yard Wall Mural Survey, and conducted public outreach to community organizations, boards, commissions, and resident groups.

The staff report stated that the Town continued to "work with Wedgewood to enhance the Hacienda and address the impacts of operations on the neighborhood" by working with Wedgewood to provide window treatments to eastern second floor windows,

... continued on Page 5

Moraga iKind co-founder, Wendell Baker, named town's 2024 Citizen of the Year

By Vera Kochan

Wendell Baker, known to many in town as the unassuming co-founder of the nonprofit Moraga iKind, has been unanimously selected as the 2024 Citizen of the Year.

According to some of the nomination letters singing Baker's praises, he is someone who doesn't seek the spotlight, but rather chooses to be a tour de force behind the scenes while spreading the iKind message, which is to "promote civility and compassion in our community. Our mission is to promote kindness and courtesy, to foster courage and bravery, based on the belief that empathy and inclusion constitute the foundation on which community is built."

Baker's "day job" as a control system engineer for Able-Baker Automation involves "doing control system integration for factories by designing and writing the programs that make things work."

Moraga iKind was formed by Baker (while he served as a scoutmaster), former superintendent of the Moraga School District Bruce Burns, and Eric Andresen after a 2012 incident whereby the Boy Scouts of America denied Andresen's son the privilege of becoming an Eagle Scout because he is gay. In 2013, the BSA changed their ruling, but by then the iKind wheels

were in motion, holding their first meeting at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. As word began to spread about the organization, the community became involved.

Baker's involvement and dedication to iKind's message and vision does not go unnoticed by members of the community. He can always be spotted at public events such as 4th of July at Commons Park, the Pear and Wine Festival, and the Moraga Community Faire carrying boxes full of free message bracelets, posters, pens, and more. Moraga iKind has donated towards the purchase of 600 T-shirts reading "All are welcome at JM" to staff and students, and Baker has purchased expensive licensing to screen anti-bullying documentaries for the PTA's movie nights for the students (often acting as the evening's sound/video technician). His presence has also been noted at the town's elementary schools and at Campolindo High School.

Heavily involved with the success of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), as well as, DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging), Baker has created laminated posters expressing messages of kindness and tolerance. He encourages students

to "Be an Upstander" when it comes to bullying by urging them to: "refuse to be a bystander; lend a hand; alert an adult; stop spreading hurtful messages; speak up; be a friend; respect differences; use welcoming language; listen to others; and encourage discussions."

"We've tried to reach out to other school districts," Baker stated, "but, it's been hit and miss. I've distributed a lot of things to the Rainbow Community Center in Concord."

Baker started spreading the organization's word by attending various town meetings in an effort to promote the iKind message. "I just wanted to show kids that the community is behind them," he explained. "It should be a consistent message." Still volunteering his services to the scouts, even though his own kids are now grown and out of the system, Baker's troops marched in the family-friendly section of San Francisco's Gay Pride Parade and won the "Absolutely Fabulous Overall Contingent".

Baker's nominators have described him as someone who "makes Moraga a safer, kinder place to live, work and play; he is leaving a lasting impression on the children of Moraga; has made a tremendous impact on the students



Photo Vera Kochan

2024 Citizen of the Year – Moraga iKind's Wendell Baker

and our local schools; is committed to serving by promoting messages of equity, belonging, and kindness; a quiet force; an invaluable asset to our community; and has truly helped make this a better place for us all."

He suspected something was up when Baker saw Moraga Citizens Network Executive Director Ellen Beans' name on his caller ID and knowing that MCN had taken over the Citizen of the Year duties from approximately 40 years under Moraga Valley Kiwanis leadership. His family was thrilled for him, but Baker was worried that he might have a scouting commitment on April 14, the day of the celebration honoring him.

MCN's decision to pick up the Citizen of the Year torch was an easy one. "It fits our mission statement," stated Beans. "We are all about getting

people to participate in our town and getting to honor someone who does that is part of the mission. We're also making the celebration low-cost to make it more inclusive for everyone."

Baker hopes to get the town's local businesses more involved with Moraga iKind by placing posters visibly in windows. He stresses that everything he promotionally offers is free. "Spread kindness – we're a pay it forward organization, and we don't take donations. Just be kind."

For more information visit: www.moragainternet.org or email Baker at: Wendell@able-baker.com.

To attend the 2024 Citizen of the Year reception on Sunday, April 14, visit: MCNMoraga.org and scroll down to: Tickets for the Citizen of the Year Celebration.

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Town Council Meetings
Wed., March 27, 6:30 p.m.
Wed., April 10, 6:30 p.m.
Planning Commission:
Tuesday, April 2, 6:30 p.m.
Park and Recreation Commission: TBA